

STATE ARCHIVES ANNUAL REPORT

2018



Secretary Gorbea views one of 13 original copies of the Bill of Rights with students at the State Archives.



Nellie M. Gorbea
Secretary of State



ABOUT US



WHO WE ARE

The Rhode Island State Archives is operated by the Rhode Island Department of State under the leadership of Secretary of State Nellie M. Gorbea. The State Archives was first authorized by R.I. Gen. Laws Chapter 42-8.1 in 1989, under the purview of the Secretary of State. It was established that "the division shall be the official custodian and trustee for the state of all public records of permanent historical, legal or other value, regardless of physical form or characteristics, which are transferred to it from any public office of the state or any political subdivision thereof."

WHAT WE DO

As the repository for official permanent records of Rhode Island state government, the State Archives strives to protect, maintain, and preserve Rhode Island's powerful history.

The State Archives has three primary objectives:

1. To advance the mission of the Rhode Island Department of State to engage and empower all Rhode Islanders by making government more accessible and transparent and encouraging civic pride;
2. To assist Rhode Island residents in learning about their history and increase awareness of Rhode Island's history; and
3. To ensure transparency and accessibility by conserving and preserving records and making them available to the public through exhibitions, public programs, and digital initiatives.

In addition to preserving permanent records of state government, the State Archives also works closely with cities and towns to manage the State Archives Local Government Records Program. Our work ensures that records across Rhode Island are maintained and preserved according to the law.

The Local Government Records Program helps cities and towns through a variety of programs including:

- Workshops & Public Presentations: State Archives staff provide updated information on standards, best practices, and State Archives services for records management and preservation; and
- Clean-Up Days: State Archives staff provide full-day guidance and on-site approval for destruction of records which have met their legal retention requirement.

THE STATE ARCHIVES TEAM

Ashley Selima
State Archivist and
Public Records
Administrator

Ken Carlson
Reference
Analyst

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Local
Government Re-
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Coordinator

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Coordinator

**Kaitlynne
Ward Morris**
Director of State
Archives, Library,
and Public
Information

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FROM SECRETARY GORBEA



Dear Rhode Islander:

As one of the original 13 colonies, Rhode Island played a critical role in the birth and growth of our nation. Our State Archives is home to an important collection of documents that chronicle our rich history dating back nearly four centuries. These historic treasures show how ordinary Rhode Islanders lived, were civically engaged, and shaped history. One of my key goals as Secretary of State is to increase engagement in civic life. Over the past year, we have been working hard to showcase these priceless documents, and the 2018 Annual Report for the Rhode Island State Archives is a record of our efforts.

The Rhode Island State Archives maintains and preserves all permanent records of state government. Within our existing 8,000 square foot facility, there are over 10 million records dating back to 1638. These records help shine a light on Rhode Island's unique history.

While our State Archives contains important documents from our local and national history, Rhode Island is one of few states whose archives do not have a permanent home. All New England states have purpose-built state-owned facilities to house and exhibit archival collections. Rhode Island is the only state that houses its archives in a commercially-leased office space. Since 1990, Rhode Island's archives have been "temporarily" housed in leased office space in Providence.

This facility fails to meet the standards for archival storage established by the National Archives & Records Administration and it is in a geographic flood zone. Thus, our archival holdings are at considerable risk for damage or permanent loss. The state insures its archival holdings for approximately \$3 million annually, however, the State Archives holds many priceless and irreplaceable documents and artifacts. Many of these are not available for public viewing, because our current location lacks appropriate climate controls, security, and exhibit space to properly and safely display these treasures to visitors.

Rhode Island's history is beautifully quirky, and endlessly surprising. This is something we can—and should be—incredibly proud of. As your Secretary of State, it is my goal to ensure that we find a permanent home for our State Archives to ensure that the richness of our history is preserved and accessible to all Rhode Islanders.

Sincerely,

Nellie M. Gorbea
Secretary of State



More than
10 MILLION
records



Accumulated over
380 YEARS



Over
3 THOUSAND
online images



38
public programs



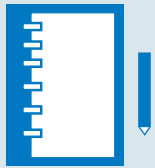
LOOKING BACK: 2018 IN REVIEW

By the Numbers

170
STUDENTS



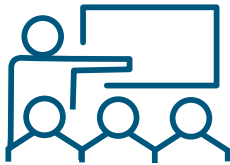
Welcomed over 170 children from 6 classrooms across Rhode Island.



550
ATTENDEES

Hosted over 550 attendees at 22 different on-site programs throughout the year.

250
PARTICIPANTS



Presented to over 250 members of the community through off-site programs and workshops.



249
OUT-OF-STATE
RESEARCHERS

Out-of-state researchers came to visit the State Archives.

28 STATES

3 COUNTRIES

4

EXHIBITIONS
DISPLAYING

175
RECORDS +
ARTIFACTS

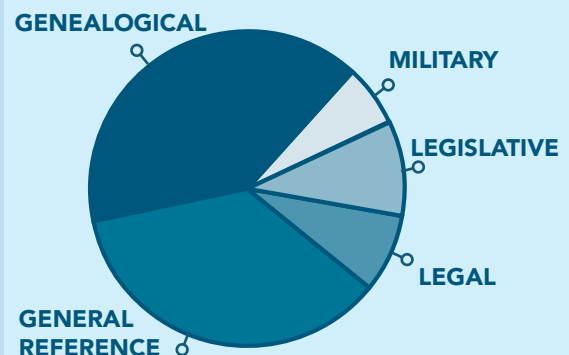
BY THE PUBLIC

5,803 QUESTIONS RECEIVED
(Mail, fax, email, and telephone)

2,034 ON-SITE RESEARCHERS

759 RECORDS RETRIEVED

BY TOPIC



Highlights

GROWING OUR COLLECTIONS

Added new holdings to the State Archives Collection encompassing 56 cubic feet of boxed records.



Legislative records from the 2016 session of the General Assembly (these records are transferred every 2 years).



Each year birth and marriage records are received after 100 years, and death records after 50 years.



Rhode Island Folk Life Archive.



Rhode Island Historic Resources Archive Documentation of Big River Bridge No. 34.

EXPANDING ACCESS

Digitized 530 documents and photographs from the State Archives' holdings, increasing public accessibility to our historic collections.



SUBJECT GUIDES

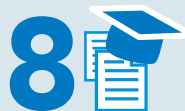
Developed subject guides to provide a map to State Archives resources by topic online.

1,300
COLLECTIONS

Launched a new online catalog for researchers to search and browse over 1,300 collections.

2,467
DIGITAL FILES

Launched a digital archive for researchers to browse over 2,000 digital media files online.



Curated eight online collections of zoomable and transcribed primary source documents for teachers to use in the classroom.

NOTABLE RESEARCH TOPICS

Dual citizenship for Portugal, Ireland, and Italy.

Historical data on dredging of Green Hill Pond, Charlestown, RI, 1960s.

Population of Rhode Island during King Philip's War, 1676.

Rhode Island African population in the 19th century.

Naval Participatory Records for World War I.

Confiscated estates during the Revolutionary War.

Enabling Act for the Bank of Newport, 1819.

Petitions and documents relating to Walter Chaloner of Newport, a Revolutionary War Loyalist.

The Papers of George Washington.

Fair Housing Practices in Rhode Island during the 1950s and 1960s.



SHARING OUR STORY

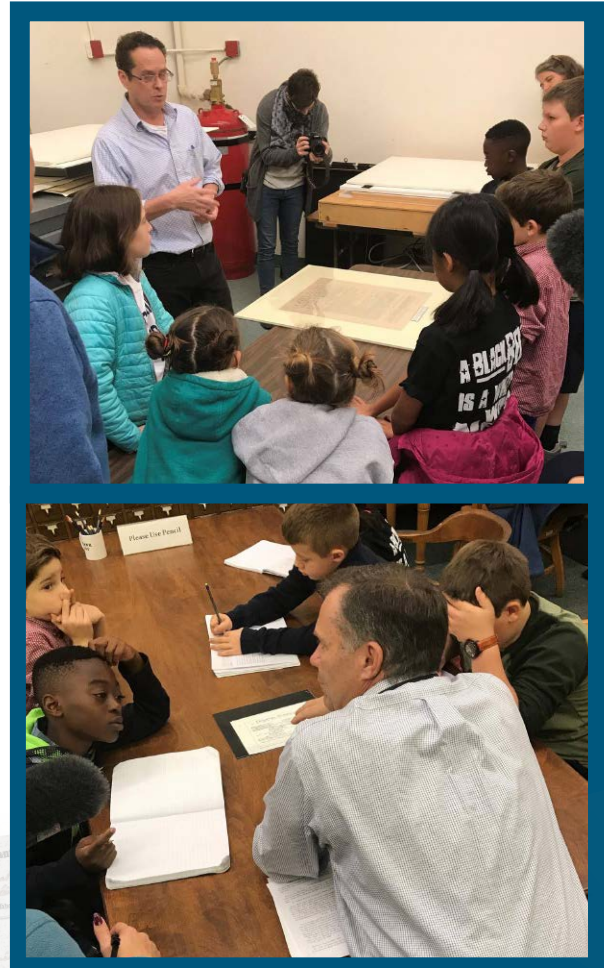
2018

MORE THAN
170
STUDENTS

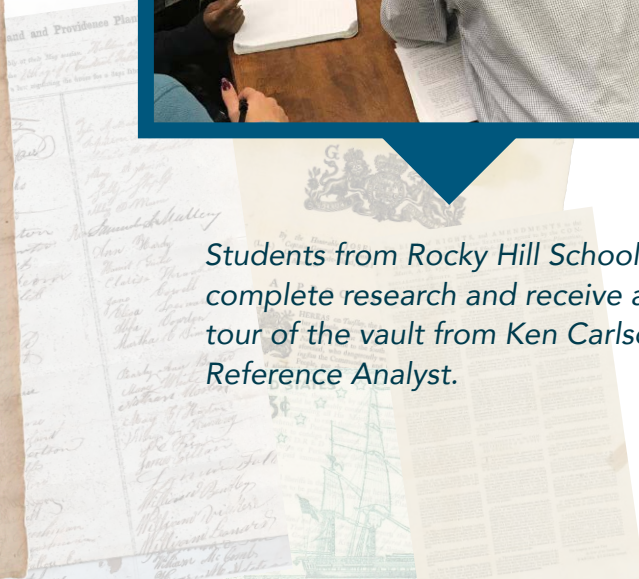
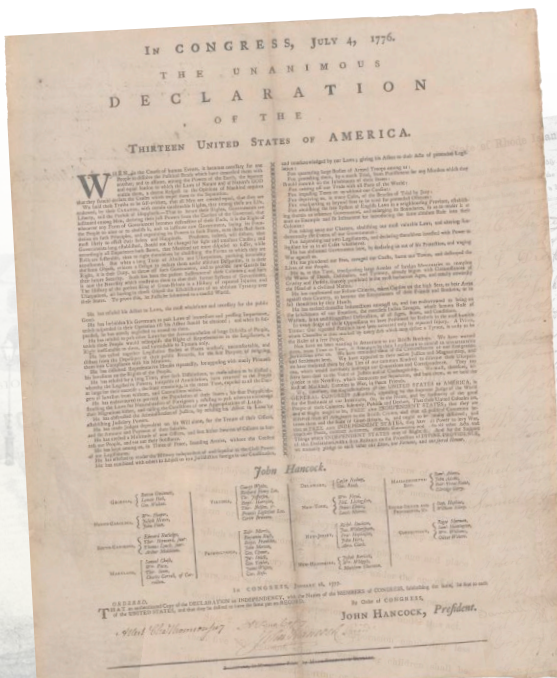
Experiential Learning at the Archives

In 2018, the State Archives opened its doors to expanded education programming, offering students in grades 4-12 the opportunity to learn about archiving, historic documents, and Rhode Island history.

While the State Archives has a space limit of 15 students per group, staff established different learning stations throughout the facility, including private staff space, to accommodate larger classrooms. Over 170 students from 6 schools visited for special programs.



Students from Rocky Hill School complete research and receive a tour of the vault from Ken Carlson, Reference Analyst.





Visit from the Lincoln School,
November 14, 2018.

"This was one of the best field trips I've taken students on in my 28 years of teaching."

- Comment received via the State Archives School Visit teacher survey.



AP History students from North Smithfield High School visited the State Archives to complete research for their final projects in May 2018. Only half the class is pictured here with Secretary of State Nellie M. Gorbea.

"Because of the size of my classes, we were not able to plan a lengthy stay and we needed to create an alternative experience because of space and time restrictions."

- Comment received via the State Archives School Visit teacher survey.



PUBLIC PROGRAMS

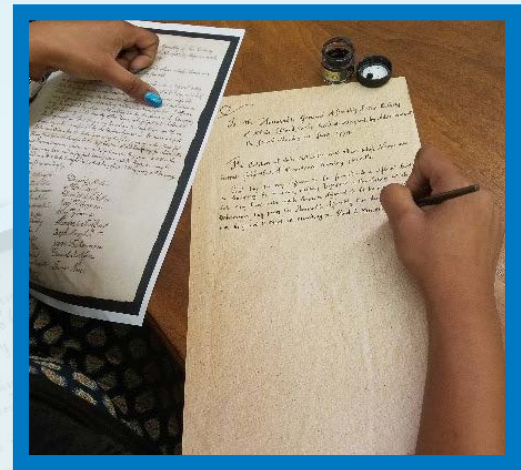
2018

550
PARTICIPANTS

The State Archives hosted several public programs and events at our downtown location to encourage Rhode Islanders to interact in new ways with our collections. Due to space limitations at our facility, we also worked with public libraries across the state to host additional programs and traveling exhibitions. Featured below are photo highlights from our events throughout the year.



Secretary of State Nellie M. Gorbea assists volunteers at the first annual **Transcription Party** on February 20, 2018, where participants typed historical documents for easier content research.



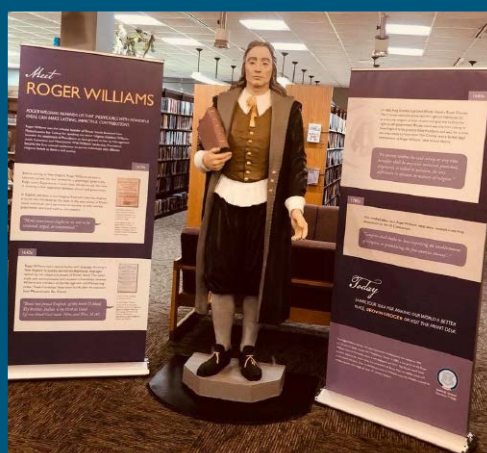
A participant tries her hand at re-writing a historic document using an ink pot, quill pen, and specialty paper during our **Handwriting History** event on September 19, 2018.



A **PVD Fest** visitor explores the history of the Gaspee through a virtual reality experience offered throughout the day on June 8, 2018.



In 2018, we launched **Roving Roger** with public libraries. This travelling exhibit features a 7' tall statue of Roger Williams accompanied by interpretive panels about our state's colonial founder.



Each year the State Archives curates exhibits focused on Rhode Island and its people. Pictured above is our exhibition **The Gaspee Raiders – Pirates or Patriots.**

Our **Traveling Treasures** pop-up exhibit went throughout the state as part of National Archives Month in October. The exhibit traveled to seven public libraries and featured the RI Folklife: The Work of Michael Bell Collection.

Our team organized a genealogy and family history workshop, called **Separating Fact from Fiction: How the Rhode Island State Archives Can Help.** Hosted at four public libraries throughout the state, State Archives staff led a discussion on identifying misinformation, how to search records, and how the State Archives assists with in-depth family history research.





CONSERVATION INITIATIVES

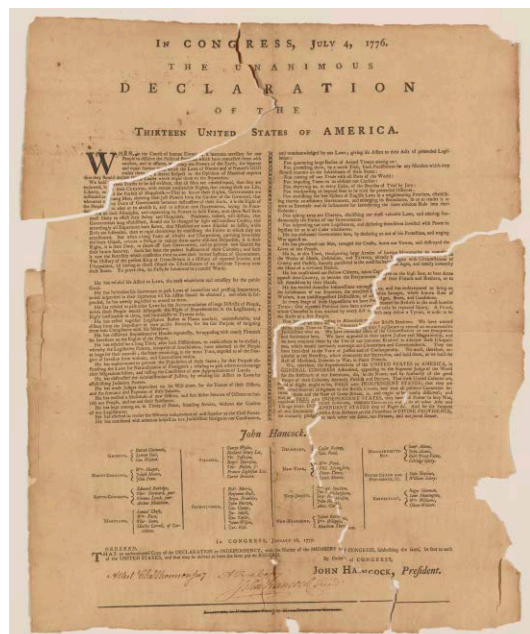
Declaring the Importance of Preservation

The State Archives is home to one of the original thirteen copies of the Declaration of Independence signed by John Hancock and sent to the colonies in the early days of the American Revolution in 1777. Following years in an outdated case, the document had become fragile, brittle, and was not available for public view. Due to the preservation concerns and priceless nature of the document, the Declaration of Independence was selected as our first project for the Conservation Account funding.

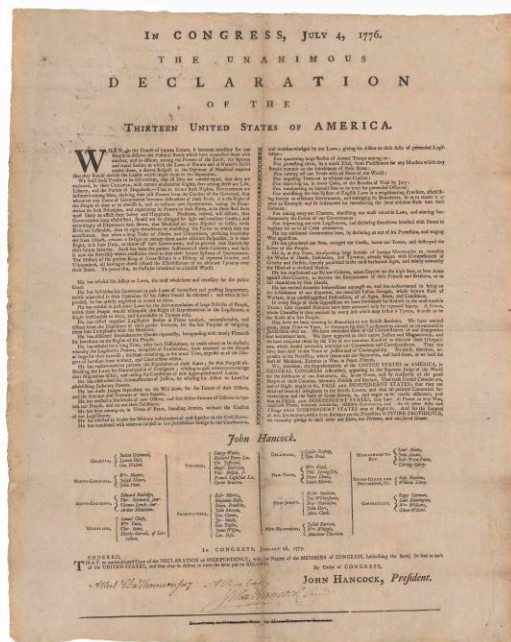
The State Archives partnered with the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC), the leading institution in the conservation and rescue of historical records in New England, to restore the document and ensure its safety for future public viewings. The NEDCC worked to address oxidization which resulted in overall discoloration and embrittlement. The delicate restoration process took 14 weeks to complete and cost \$16,800.

Under the watchful eye of the Rhode Island State Police, the document returned to the State Archives on June 18, 2018, in a new, specially-designed archival safe housing. The new housing is acid-free, UV-filtered on the inside, and provides protection from light, dust, pests, and environmental risks. With this new housing, the back of the document showing the date it was originally received by the General Assembly is safely visible for the first time.

We thank the professionals at the NEDCC for their dedication and hard work in guaranteeing the Declaration of Independence is presentable and safe for many years to come. We also thank the Rhode Island State Police for their assistance in transporting and protecting this priceless Rhode Island treasure.



The document's original condition (pictured on left) was very brittle with several large tears that separated it into three pieces. Following the 14-week restoration project at NEDCC, the document was fully restored and all fragments were rejoined.

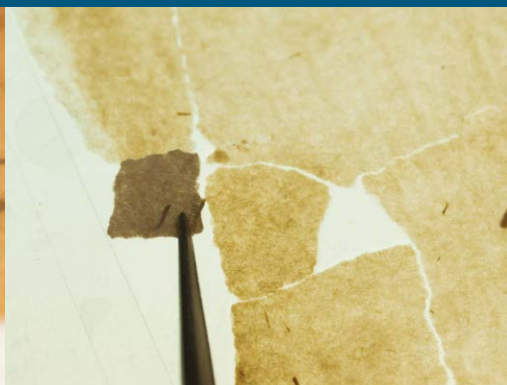


Photos courtesy of the Northeast Document Conservation Center.

1 Removal of the excess lining on the back of the document.



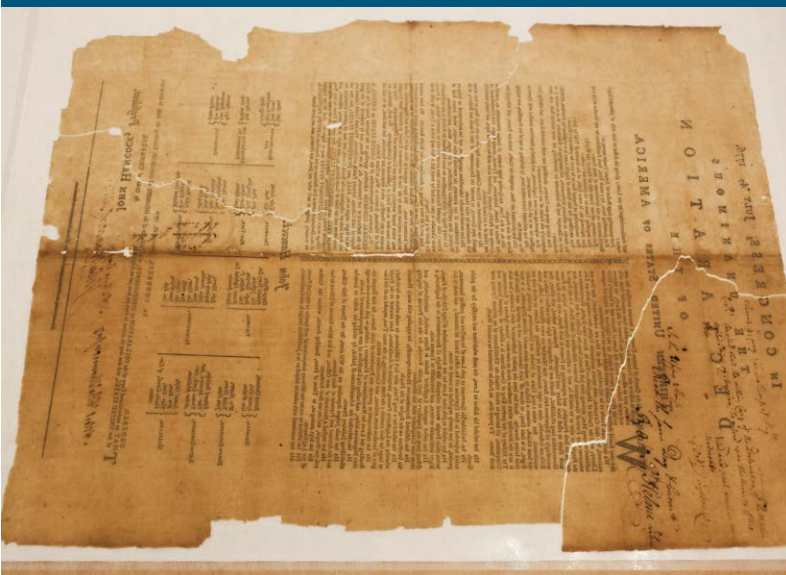
2 Staff at NEDCC match each fragment.



3 Fragments were carefully rejoined to the document.



THE PROCESS



4 The Declaration of Independence during treatment.



5 The NEDCC team finalizes treatment of the Declaration of Independence.





LOOKING FORWARD

A New Facility for our State's Historic Collections



2018 was a tremendous year for the State Archives. Through conservation projects, public programs, and school visits, we were able to engage new audiences and expand access to our facility.

However, our success was ultimately limited by the physical deficiencies of our current location. Archival facilities require highly specialized mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems, stringent climate and light controls, and the highest levels of security. These elements must all be carefully balanced with ensuring the facility retains sufficient space for members of the public to visit and conduct research. As our collection continues to expand, our ability to accommodate visitors wanes.

Today, we are the one of the few, if not the only state in the United States that houses its archives in a commercially-leased office space. Twenty-six years after temporarily re-locating to our current space, we have reached the critical point where our invaluable historic collections—and the public's access to them—are at risk.

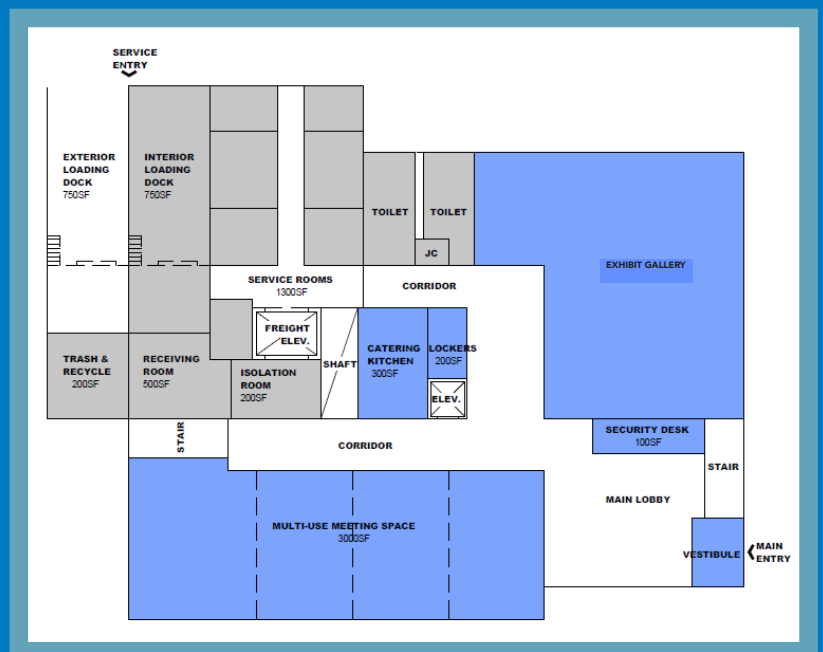
In 2018, the Department of State invested \$150,000 to complete a Site Selection Study which identified a location for a new Rhode Island Archives & History Center. This report outlines a 52,000 square-foot facility featuring state-of-the-art light, climate, and security controls along with over 3,000 square feet of dedicated exhibition space and public meeting space.

Located on Capitol Hill, this facility will be an iconic hub for cultural tourism and will complement other place-making initiatives occurring throughout Providence today. Studies have shown repeatedly that investing in the cultural economy is good business. In 2015, Americans for the Arts conducted a study entitled, "Arts & Economic Prosperity V," which reports that nonprofit arts and culture is a \$205.7 million industry in the City of Providence, supports 5,115 full-time equivalent jobs, and generates \$20.9 million in local and state government revenue. Nationally, the industry generated \$166.3 billion of economic activity and supported 4.6 million jobs.

The lease for our current facility will expire in 2019. Now is the time to make the choice to invest in a new, state-of-the-art facility that will secure and preserve our historical records.



OUR PAST DESERVES A MUCH BETTER FUTURE.



A conceptual layout of the ground floor of the new Rhode Island Archives & History Center.



Nellie M. Gorbea
Secretary of State

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